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# Famine in USSR

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*The Russian Economic Bulletin, a monthly journal published in Paris, in French, edited by a group of professors of the Russian Commercial Institute, has deemed it advisable to publish in English Professor A. MARKOFF's article on « Famine in the U. S. S. R. », which appeared in N° 9 of the Bulletin.*



*A map of the chief famine-afflicted regions is included.*



## Famine in Soviet Russia

The « Russian Economic Bulletin » has collected much information which shows indisputably that Soviet Russia is in the grip of a severe famine. This information is drawn from various sources.

I. Numerous letters received from Russians in the U. R. S. S. The « Bulletin » has many such, and their genuineness cannot be disputed. They come from various regions, but they tell the same story of the raging of an unprecedented famine. They permit the fixation of the principal districts affected, and they reveal the localities where cannibalism has been the horrible consequence.

A former commander of the Red Army wrote from the Northern Caucasus to relatives in France, the letter being dated May 16, in these terms :

«... Horrible things are happening. Entire villages are being completely depopulated by famine. One such is U. Bodies of the dead lie for days in the houses because there is no-one to remove them. They are buried coffinless in a common grave. In dark corners of back streets bodies are partly devoured by dogs. Almost all dogs and cats have been eaten. Horse meat is considered a delicacy, and is sold openly ».

« Human flesh has also been eaten. Cutlets and sausages made from human flesh are to be found at the markets. There have been cases where mothers have killed their children to eat them. These are not tales. There was such a case in Uss. A woman killed the blind Bissatcha in

order to eat him ; Mara surely knows this man. Starving people grab food and money from one at the markets. One has to hold his purchases with both hands. The authorities are inactive. They intervene only to confiscate flour and bread which is sold illicitly. ; (1)

II. Letters from foreigners residing in U. S. S. R., reports from returned foreign technicians, and information appearing in the foreign Press depict the famine in various ways. Much of this material has been published in Great Britain, Chekoslovakia and Germany. Particular attention has to be drawn to an article by M. P. Berland, published in «Le Temps» on July 18. His description of the famine agrees with those of others.

Writing in the « Morning Post » Mr Malcolm Muggeridge says :

« The particular horror of their rule is what they have done in the villages. This, I am convinced, is one of the most monstrous crimes in history, so terrible the people in the future will scarcely be able to believe it ever happened. If you go now to the Ukraine or the North Caucasus, exceedingly beautiful countries and formerly amongst the most fertile in the world, you will find them like a desert ; fields choked with weeds and neglected ; no livestock or horses, villages seeming to be deserted ; peasants famished, often their bodies swollen, unutterably wretched. »

« You will discover, if you question them, that they have had no bread at all for three months past ; only potatoes and some millet... They will tell you that many have already died of famine, and that many are dying every day ; that thousands have been shot by the Government and hundreds of thousands exiled ; that it is a crime, punishable by death sentence without trial, for them to have grain in their houses... »

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(1) « *Russian Economic Bulletin* », N°7, published many of these letters. Others appeared in « *Entente internationale contre la Troisième Internationale* ». Documentation, Juillet — Août, 1933.

« I saw these conditions for myself in the North Caucasus and the Ukraine and heard from many sources, some Russian, some foreign, and some even Communist, that similar conditions prevailed in all the agricultural districts of Russia... »

« It is impossible to describe the horror of it... Villages devastated by the Bolsheviks were terrible beyond words because there seemed no end... It was as though a blight had settled on the country. It was as though nothing would ever grow there again... »

M. P. Berland writes in « *Le Temps* » :

« The food situation has suddenly worsened during recent months, to such an extent that it can only be compared with 1920, the year of great famine. The catastrophe, the coming of which was obvious even to the blindest, and which we predicted more than a year ago («*Le Temps*», May 31, 1932), has gripped the country. The silence of the Press on this point is one of the most curious things in contemporary Russia. The food situation is surrounded by a kind of conspiracy of silence, but the catastrophic situation, nevertheless, is the secret of Polichinelle. Innocent persons in Paris or elsewhere who follow the Soviet Press will not have a suspicion of it. »

« The official censorship, the mastery of the telegraph, pitilessly mutilates the despatches of foreign journalists, and allows the passage only of such colourless expressions as « grave food difficulties », eloquent to those who know Soviet Russia, but which do not reflect the true state of affairs. »

« In 1920 the towns suffered. Transport was paralysed ; there was no stable money, and the peasants refused to hand over their products in exchange for depreciated monetary units. But the country people, in the majority of cases, had reserves of food... Now the position is reversed. By a paradox of Soviet economy the country suffers more than the town. The peasants flock to the great centres of population in order to buy bread the fruit of their toil-which the State has taken from them to feed the

privileged sections of the nation, the Army, the G.P.U., specialists and qualified workers. In the eyes of the peasant the townsman has become a parasite who lives at his expense, a « darmoyed », that is to say a « free feeder ». But migration to the towns has become almost impossible; it has become more difficult to secure railway tickets, and in certain places they are only issued with G.P.U. authority. In addition, the re-establishment of the passport system aims at stopping travel, the tying of a nomad population to fixed places in order to assure to the authorities control over workers, without whom directed economy would be impossible, and to give to them a feeling of security. »

« To the famine is joined the usual typhus epidemic, as was the case in 1920—21. Cases of plague have been reported from the Urals. The existence of these diseases is officially denied. This denial, however, does not unfortunately prevent them inflicting severe ravages. »

« In 1920 the famine was officially recognised. The Government gave it prominence. Special commissions were organised to struggle against the calamity, and the Bolsheviks openly appealed for international aid. A similar frankness at present appears impossible. An avowal would provoke the question, How did this happen ? »

III. Reports of persons who have made special enquiries about agriculture in Russia, about the severity of the famine, and the area affected, Dr Schiller's memorandum merits special attention. He visited the Southern Caucasus. The pamphlet, « Brothers in Need », published by Evangelischer Pressverband for Deutschland, Berlin, must also be mentioned. The statements of German refugees in the Schneidemole camp, gathered by Dr Auhagen, professor of the Eastern Europe Institute, and a great specialist on Russian agriculture, are also revealing (These German documents are quoted from « Cillac » — organ du centre international de lutte active contre le Communisme, published in Brussels).

Dr Schiller says that from the autumn of 1932 the food situation

became catastrophic in many regions. The population declined because of deportation and in consequence of a high death rate owing to famine. Villages have been depopulated. Politically the cossaks have been exterminated. Cases of cannibalism were frequent. The inhabitants of Temichbek have fallen in numbers from 15,000 to 7,000. In many places the population has declined 15 per cent. The villages of Kamennobrodskaja, Lagovskaia and Sredne-Egorlytskaia are completely depopulated. In some villages from 20 to 30 persons die daily. Many houses have been abandoned. Kitchen gardens, even those attached to houses where people still live, are not cultivated. One rarely sees cats and dogs; they are eaten. There is neither bread nor flour at the markets. They are rarely to be seen even at Torgsin shops. The general feeling is not so much hate as apathy. One can travel in all security. The spirit of aggression against the Soviets is completely extinguished. Railway tickets are only delivered on the production of special permits. The number of deaths will rise towards the autumn. Nobody aids the people, and the Government is completely disinterested.

« The famine is sharper than it was in 1921, when five million persons died from starvation. It would, have been possible to save the starving people with the cereals the Government has shipped abroad. »

« Everywhere complete inertia is noticeable. Limbs are swollen because of undernourishment. At Ekaterinodar a body lay in the street. People are buried in their own gardens. At Ekaterinodar bodies were found from which pieces of flesh had been removed for eating. Under these conditions it may be asked, who will gather the harvest ? A new population would be necessary. »

Extracts from answers received by Professor Auhagen from German refugees lately resident in Russia reveal the same horrible conditions :

« In Southern Ukraine and the Northern Caucasus the famine

is much worse than it was in 1920—21. In the Ukraine the famine spreads northwards. In Kharkov bodies lay in the streets. Persons fell from weakness in the streets, and were unable to masticate when food was placed before them. Dogs and cats have disappeared. In the spring it was possible to catch marmots, but these animals have now given out. People talk of horrible cases of cannibalism. In Taganrog district a mother cut the throats of three of her children. In Krivorozje a woman who murdered her husband was arrested. She intended to eat him. In the village of Sofievka, in the Stavropol region, half of the population died from starvation. »

Famine rages in the Orenbourg region, but not so acutely as in the Ukraine. The position is not so bad as in the Middle-Volga region, down to Samara. The German-Volga Republic is seriously affected. There have been many deaths from starvation on the Kirghiz Steppes.

All refugees blame collectivisation for the calamity. « Collectivisation is utter wreck », they say. High taxation and corn collection have also been big factors in promoting the famine. Even this year, when famine is raging, unbearable taxation in kind is being imposed. A large proportion of domestic animals has been destroyed. Here is a typical letter published in the pamphlet, «Brothers in Need. »

« I was in the Northern Caucasus. The position is quite undescribable. The people have nothing to eat. Many die daily. When a cow or horse dies the carcase is shared by many persons. They even eat the skin. Recently some peasants went to a field for fodder. Five miles from home they saw two dead horses on the roadside. Nobody knew how long they had lain there. When they returned home and told their friends about the dead horses, they dashed off to secure portions of the carcasses. Many fell ill in consequence, and some died. Nobody bothers about ascertaining the reasons for the deaths of cattle. Dogs and cats have all been eaten. In one house the father died. The neighbours awaited an invitation to the funeral, but none came. They went to the house, and they found the mother and her son seated near the body and engaged



in deep discussion. They asked what they were talking about, and the widow said they were trying to decide whether to bury or eat the corpse. Such incidents are frequently mentioned. »

« In 1921 the dearth was great, but it cannot be compared with the present situation. In many villages fifty per cent of the people have died. The houses stand empty. » (This letter was despatched in April 1933).

IV. And, last, an attentive perusal of the Soviet Press also indicates the existences of famine. Officially the Government says all is well with agriculture, but an analysis of their Press shows the position to be quite catastrophic. (2) Judging by this material it is possible to draw the following conclusions :

a) After the introduction of collectivisation fields became overgrown with weeds. The authorities frequently mobilised whole local populations to exterminate the weeds, but efficient results were not achieved. There followed a plague of all sorts of nefarious insects and animals. The decline of agriculture is also explainable by inferior workmanship.

b) Sowing has been greatly delayed under collectivisation. In the Ukraine, the Northern Caucasus, in the Lower Volga region and in other districts where climatic conditions demand the completion of sowing within ten-twelve days, it sometimes continued for sixty days (as reports to the Commissariat of Agriculture demonstrate). Winter sowing was sometimes carried out when the ground was frozen. Because of

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(2) The « *Russian Economic Bulletin* » has published several articles on this matter i.e. « *The Agricultural Policy of the Soviets and its Results* », by Prof. A. Markov (N° 1, October 1932), « *The Wheat Crop* », by N. Popov (N° 2, Nov. 1932), « *What is Socialist Agriculture in the U. R. S. S. ?* », by M. Peroff (N° 4, January 1933) and « *Soviet Wheat Collection in 1932* », by M. Grogorovich (N° 5, Feb. 1933).

sowing delays the young shoots perished from drought, sold or noxious insects. In addition the starving peasants frequently ate seed corn. Last spring Moscow was obliged to send seed to the collective and State farms of the Northern Caucasus and the Ukraine where, in 1932, according to reports of the Commissariat of Agriculture, the harvest was satisfactory.

c) There are other facts which prove that the food position is very tense : 1) The sharp rise in food prices. In comparison with the period of the New Economic Policy, 1921—27, prices rose sometimes by 3.000 per cent. 2) The diminution in the number of food rations in towns and cities by the expulsion of citizens. (The re-imposition of the passport system). 3) The introduction of capital punishment for infraction of rules for the collective working of land, and the theft of corn.

d) The supervision of threshing during the current harvesting season has been entrusted to Machine and Tractor Stations which agriculturally represent the central government, and which are staffed by true red Communists. As a precaution against theft threshing machines on collectives have been under continuous guard of the Communists. By these means all threshed corn will be controlled by the State. A special detachment has been formed to guard the fields. Thousands of watch towers have been erected to effect this supervision more efficiently.

The information drawn from Soviet Press sources thus corroborates that of Russians and foreigners.

Lack of space prevents further quotation, but sufficient evidence has been presented to permit the following conclusions :

a) There is an acute shortage of food in the whole country, but the following region are experiencing dire need :

Regions	Denoted on map	Population Millions	Territory Thousands km <sup>2</sup>
Ukraine	12	31,6	451,8
Northern Caucasus	18	9,3	293,6
Lower Volga	17	5,8	334,0
Middle Volga	13	7,5	236,0
Central Black-Soil Region	11	11,7	191,9

An area of 1.507.300 sq. kilometres, having a population of 65,9 mil. is in the grip of famine. This exceeds in area and population the disaster of 1920—21 (Orenburg province, the Tartar and Bashkir Republics and the Middle Volga region were then principally affected). The population of the Don, the Kuban and the Terek, all cossack territories, is suffering particularly, not only from lack of food, but because of iron hand repression. Many people have been shot, and many thousands have been deported to the inhospitable northern wastes. (The cossack areas are denoted on the map by C.). There are undoubtedly other famine-afflicted areas, some districts of Siberia, for example, but direct information is lacking at present.

b) Districts once the richest in Russia, and renowned as producers of fine grade wheat are now the most afflicted by famine. In the worst position of all are the Northern Caucasus, particularly the Kuban section (B on the map). The position in region A on the map) usually dependent for grain supplies upon southern provinces is not so bad. The famine is worst where the greatest number of private peasant farms has been collectivised. Indeed, collectivisation is the principal cause of the catastrophe.

c) The country population suffers more from famine than the town population. Peasants usually growing wheat now seek it the cities.

This is explained by the fact that the Government simply took as much of the harvest as it could lay hands upon so that it could retain the allegiance of those sections of the population upon whom it relies. But there are many starving people in the towns. They are Soviet workers and employees, who are deprived of rations when discharged from factories and Government departments.

d) The present famine is not a sudden phenomenon, but is the result of Soviet policy over a series of years. Above all it is the consequence of collectivisation, which broke up multitudes of peasant farms, especially the best worked farms, the development of which was assisted by the Government during the N.E.P. period. The destruction of agriculture during recent years has been more rapid than it was in 1918-21, when Lenin experimented with socialisation of the land. The present famine differs from that of 1920—21 in that it has developed under climatic conditions favourable to good harvests and a bounteous export. The earlier famine was due not only to Communist policy but to drought.

e) In Lenin's days the Government recognised the existence of famine, and permitted foreigners to assist in relief. The present dictators deny the existence of famine, and declare that all is well. The victims of famine thus receive no assistance.

f) There is no foundation for a belief in improvement. The calamity is due not to weather conditions but to the policy of the present rulers of Russia. Their policy becomes more and more intransigent. The reduction of the population is one of the measures wherewith the socialist reconstruction of the country will be effected. By a reduction of population the Soviet authorities endeavour to attain a balance between a decreased volume of food products and consumption.

g) Information concerning the present famine indicates that it is more devastating than that of 1920—21, when, according to Soviet statistics, five million persons perished. Some observers, Dr Schiller, for example, state that the population of the U.R.S.S. begins to decline,

instead of registering the usual increase of about three millions per annum. Judging by descriptions of the position in certain regions, where villages are losing half of their inhabitants, it may be assumed that several millions in all must perish.

The last spring sowings were carried out in unsatisfactory manner. The land was badly worked, the sowing was delayed and part of the seed was used for food by starving peasants. An unsatisfactory crop is inevitable. Ignoring the necessities of the people the Government will seize, by violence if necessary, most of the fruit of the harvest, leaving the people to their fate. The food position will gradually become worse. Under present conditions it cannot improve because the foundations of agriculture have been destroyed. A persistent decline in future harvests is inevitable.

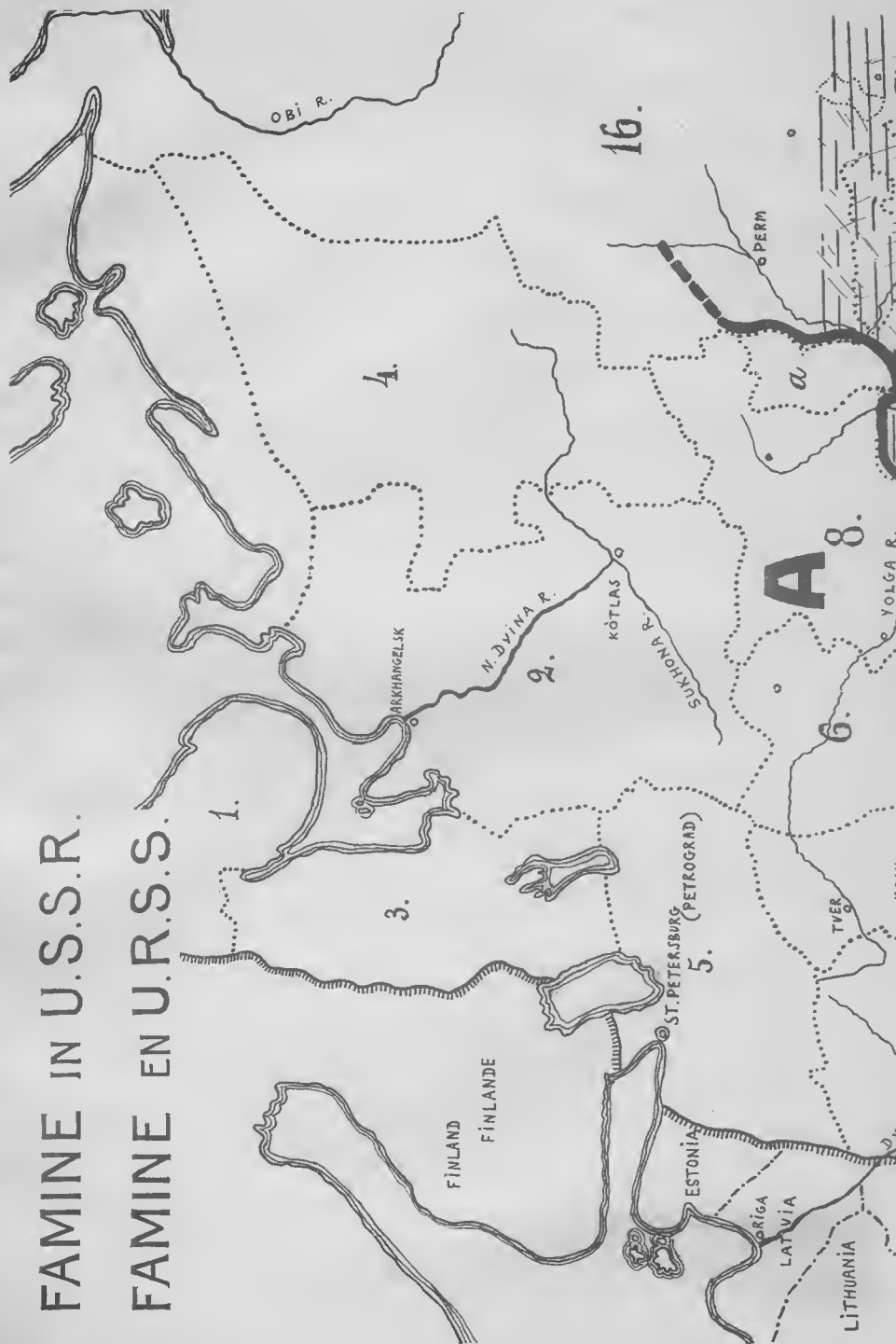
As the Soviet Government denies the existence of the famine the problem of foreign relief is very complicated. But such relief is necessary. Foreign assistance can save millions of lives only if control of relief is retained in foreign hands.

The relief problem has not yet been adequately discussed. Despite the deliberate opposition of the Soviet Government the succour of millions of suffering Russians should be undertaken.

Profess. A. MARKOFF.

FAMINE IN U.S.S.R.

FAMINE EN U.R.S.S.





## CHIEF FAMINE-STRICKEN REGIONS IN 1933

(EUROPEAN PART OF THE U.S.S.R.)

TERRITORY OF USSR (in Europe & Asia) aggregates 21,200,000 sq. km.

The population on June 1, 1931, was 162,100,000.

Map indications. —

### A. — Consuming Regions

Percentage of farms collectivised in the Spring of 1931.

1. — Kola Peninsula	—
2. — Northern territory	21,9
3. — Karelia	31,5
4. — Komi region	—
5. — Leningrad region	29,3
6. — Ivanov industrial region	27,2
7. — Moscow region	29,9
8. — Nijni Novgorod territory	25,4
9. — Ruthenia	24,1

### B. — Producing Regions:

10. — Western region	35,2
11. — Central Black-Soil region	49,6
12. — Ukraine	61,— (In Steppe section 80,9)
13. — Middle Volga territory	61,4 (right bank) 81,8 (left bank)
14. — Tartar Republic	32,8
15. — Bashkir Republic	44,—
16. — Ural region	—
17. — Lower Volga territory	78,8
18. — Northern Caucasus	81,2
19, 20, 21 — Transeaucasia (Georgia, Azerbaijan & Armenia)	From 21,2 to 38.—

Worst stricken regions (Indicated by diagonal lines on map) are denoted by figures.

	Percentage of collectivisation	Population (in millions)
Ukraine — 12	61 (In Steppe section 80,9)	31,6
Northern Caucasus — 18	81,2	9,3
Lower Volga — 17	78,8	5,8
Middle Volga — 13	From 61,4 to 81,8	7,5
Central Black-Soil reg. — 11	49,6	11,7

The letter C. indicates Don, Kuban & Terek Cossack territories.

The letter C<sub>1</sub> indicates Ural & Orenburg cossack territories.

The Population of the cossack territories is perishing in greater proportion because Communist persecution is allied to famine.





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